

“Art as a Window to a Farther Reality”

By

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May 11, 2011

To the Dixie Archaeology Society

The premise of Ben’s talk is that mankind has always tried to represent reality in its art, with each artist giving his perception of reality. He gave examples of art created in the middle ages to the present to make his point. He then extends this hypothesis to early Native Americans by detailing two very different rock art sites.

Flag Point is a site located east of Kanab, Utah. On a plateau, one finds large, three toed dinosaur tracks (Figure 1).



Figure 1 – Dinosaur tracks at Flag Point

On the cliff face below the plateau one finds a large pictograph panel (Figure 2).



Figure 2 – Pictograph Panel at Flag Point



Figure 3 – Dinosaur Track Pictograph at Flag Point

On the panel at the lower left, one finds what appears to be a large “bird” track. This track was much larger than a bear track, which is shown to provide a sense of scale. There are a number of “bird like” figures associated with the large bird track. Knowing about

the dinosaur tracks above the glyph panel, one can make the assumption that the large bird track represents the dinosaur track seen on the plateau. One can also assume that the artist thought that this was made by a giant bird, hence the large bird like figures. He also must have thought that this was an important being, because he painted a series of “dancers” on both sides of the large track, in essence paying homage to the large creature. Were special ceremonies held at this location?

Quail Point is a pictograph site located on the Gila River in central Arizona. The dominant feature of the glyphs at Quail Point is birds, such as Quail (Figure 4), Hummingbirds (Figure 5) and Eagles (Figure 6 and 7).



Figure 4 – The Quail of Quail Point



Figure 5 – The Hummingbird of Hummingbird Point



Figure 6 – Birds (Eagles) in Flight

Figure 7 represents a typical bird (eagle) at Quail point. They are generally shown with round bodies and cross shaped wings and tail feathers. Their heads are in profile with a beak that is shaped like an eagle's beak. Their heads are generally pointed in the same direction, east. Also the bird image appears to be associated with a crack in the rock.

Examination of the image in Figure 7 will show that the round body and wings and tail feathers look like the sun with the sun's rays. The cross shaped image to the left of the bird represents the Venus star. The birds looking east indicate that they may represent the rising sun and Venus as the morning star. The association with the crack means that they are emerging from the rock.

However if you in fact look east you will see the rock images in Figure 8. The rock formation clearly shows the shape of an eagle's head with a pointed, hooked beak. They also show a number of "birds" "emerging" from the rock face. This is clearly the reality that the artist was trying to show in his rock art drawings.

One must speculate that at some point in the Venus cycle, she will appear in the precise location as indicated by the rock art image in Figure 7. Could this be a time of ceremony?



Figure 7 – An Eagle of Quail Point



Figure 8 – Rock formations at Quail Point

Commentary: One point that I and others have made many times is that when viewing rock art, one must also view the surroundings in order to attempt to understand the context of the rock art and the native peoples that created the art. Ben’s talk makes this exact point. One would not have understood the rock art if they were merely presented with photographs. These two cases clearly show that the rock art is all about the surrounding features that inspired the artist(s) and likely were the reason for the ceremonies that may have taken place at these locations.

John Mangels